

HHS NEWS

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CDC Report Documents First Ever Decline in AIDS Deaths in the U.S.

For the first time in the AIDS epidemic, there has been a marked decline in the number of deaths among people with AIDS, according to a report released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Today's CDC *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* documents that deaths among people with AIDS declined 12% during the first six months of 1996, compared to the first six months of 1995.

"This is great news for all Americans living with AIDS and those who love them," said Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala. "Our sustained national investment in AIDS research, prevention, and treatment is paying a huge dividend for the American people."

The decline in AIDS deaths is likely due to improvements in recent years in treatments that delay the progression of HIV disease and prevent opportunistic infections, coupled with the success of prevention efforts in slowing the growth of the epidemic overall, CDC said. While it is too soon to determine the impact that the use of protease inhibitors as part of combination therapies will have on these trends, these therapies promise to further lengthen the lifespan of individuals living with HIV.

CDC reports that the estimated number of people diagnosed with AIDS in 1995 (AIDS incidence), increased just 2%, reflecting in part the ongoing success of HIV and AIDS prevention

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efforts. As AIDS incidence has stabilized, and deaths have begun to decrease, the number of people living with AIDS (prevalence) has grown, rising 10% since mid-1995. AIDS prevalence will

continue to increase, the CDC said, underscoring an increasing need for medical and other services for people living with AIDS and the critical need for prevention efforts to reduce the number of new HIV infections.

“As we continue to work to develop better treatment options, we must not lose sight of the fact that the best way to truly reduce the number of people who will die of AIDS is to prevent HIV infection in the first place,” said CDC Director David Satcher, M.D, Ph.D., “Prevention remains our best and most cost-effective approach for bringing the HIV/AIDS epidemic under control and saving lives.”

Trends in AIDS incidence and deaths varied by risk group, gender, and race, and both AIDS incidence and AIDS deaths continued to increase among women and among people infected through heterosexual contact. While AIDS deaths declined among all racial/ethnic groups, declines were much greater among whites (21%) than among blacks (2%) or Hispanics (10%).

“We have made a great deal of progress in both prevention and treatment of AIDS, but declines have not yet been seen in all people. As we move forward into the next era in HIV and AIDS prevention, we must ensure we reach women and minority communities with effective prevention programs and provide access to quality care,” stressed Satcher.

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Note: HHS press releases are available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.dhhs.gov>.